

INTRODUCTION

Aim: This booklet presents a number of ideas and principles concerning emergency relief and disaster prevention. These should contribute to better informed decision making, at a variety of levels, through which the quality of emergency relief and disaster prevention activities can be improved. These activities should be less stop-gap and ad hoc in nature. Instead, they should be more coherent so that both relief and disaster prevention contribute to development.

Methods: To structure this booklet four levels of ideas have been identified. These are:

- contextual issues
- conceptual issues
- institutional and orientational principles and
- operational principles

While these four levels provide a framework, they are fluid divisions which have overlaps so far as a number of the ideas are concerned.

Audience: This booklet is targeted at field staff working in emergency relief and disaster prevention. It should also be of use to higher level decision makers in relief organisations government departments, and agencies which fund relief and development activities

Nature and Limitations: This booklet is not a manual for relief provision and disaster prevention. Although disaster situations have common elements they are never identical. Responses must be adjusted from case to case. Consequently, this booklet cannot be prescriptive. Rather it seeks to be thought-provoking, and raise a number of ideas which should be kept in mind for best practice in relief and disaster prevention.

Relevance: The ideas presented here focus upon the experiences within the Horn of Africa. However, because this booklet is not prescriptive, it should be of wider relevance to staff working in other parts of the world.

Context: This booklet, and study on which it is based, were stimulated by a number of important changes in disaster and development situations, these include:

- the rise in complex emergencies, which tend to be prolonged and repetitive,
- the growing demands upon donors' relief budgets from disasters and the competition with development funding to which this had led,
- the economic and political pressures, not least among donors, for solutions to prolonged complex emergencies,
- the increasing requirements of donors that relief and rehabilitation work should be better justified and have verifiable impacts
- a growing questioning within the humanitarian aid community of the relationship between relief rehabilitation and development, and

-the changing governance situation, particularly the growth of decentralisation and regional politics, and its impact upon complex emergencies and the provision of relief

Perspective: Overall this booklet suggests that greater attention must be given in complex emergency situations to six major ideas. These are:

-analysis of the contextual situation within which relief activities take place, recognising the underlying structural forces and the development situation from which affected community has come,

-monitoring, evaluation and impact awareness of relief measures, to facilitate assessment of the effectiveness of relief and its implications for environmental, political and socio-economic conditions,

-improved linkages between relief rehabilitation and development, recognising the need for simultaneous, but not merged, undertaking of these activities,

-use of a development mode of thinking and acting as much as possible in activities related to disasters and emergencies, including minimisation of the relief period and return of disaster victims to a development situation as soon as possible,

-use of alternative methods for providing relief, recognising that relief can always be undertaken better and that innovative approaches must be explored, and

-greater emphasis upon disaster prevention and preparedness activities.

Sources and Further Reading: The booklet is based on a study undertaken in which evaluated Swedish support for disaster relief in the Horn of Africa. The main report of this study was published by SIDA in 1995 under the title 'What Relief for the Horn? - Sida supported emergency operations in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Southern Sudan, Somalia and Djibouti'.

Unless otherwise stated the materials and examples used in this booklet are drawn from the evaluation study. Other sources are specifically cited and may be of use for those wishing to go further in this area.